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ALL IS BRIGHT

Elk Point is all a-glow as residents light up, decorate yards with winning displays for the festive season.... Page 2

CONCERT TIME

Jack and Jill Playschool delight their audience with Christmas songs and recitations..... Page 6

Elk Point Review

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Vicki Brooker photo

LITTLE DRUMMER GIRLS AND BOYS and their cymbal-clanging classmates from Alison Newby's 1A class stole the show with their rendition of the holiday favourite. More photos, Page 8.

EPE concert celebrates Christmas movies

VICKI BROOKER
Review Staff

"Let's Go to the Movies" was the theme of Elk Point Elementary School's Christmas concerts this year, and class after class sang their way through hit songs made popular by Christmas movies spanning more than six decades.

After a warm welcome from vice principal Leanne Vinge, who recalled that "40 years ago, I was doing a square dance on this stage," Wednesday's program began with a movie clip on the big screen to the right of the stage before Debbie Woods' Kindergarten class charmed the audience with their dance from "The Nutcracker," complete with gift shaking and dreams of Christmas to come

Stephanie Leaf's Grade 4B brought one of the songs from "The Nightmare Before Christmas" to life, as they asked, "What's This?" about the Christmas town that suddenly appeared in the 1993 movie.

Lee Ann Wozniak's 1Bs celebrated the snowman who came to life in 'Jack Frost" as they sang about the fun to be had on the "Sleigh Ride".

Like the star of the 2012 movie, "The Christmas Song," Reanne Mudryk's Grade 5s were "not doing this to win, but to give," as they took up their recorders and played and sang "The First Noel."

Not everyone wants to give, take, for instance "The Grinch," who Stephanie Lefebvre's Grade 3 Bs told, "You're a Mean One, Mr. Grinch!" in their song.

Remember "The Santa Clause" of 1994, and the father who tried very hard to explain to his doubting son just how reindeer could fly? Philip Ng's Grade 6As didn't bother explaining, they were too busy playing their ukuleles and singing. "Hear Our Voices."

Another instrumental number was next, with Rhonda Stuparyk and Rayel Cardinal's split 2/3 class playing "Do You Hear What I Hear?" on xylophones, that song featured in "The Christmas Project."

Another familiar song, "Deck the Halls" was featured in a 2006 movie of the same name, where the goal was to deck them so well that the result could be seen from space. Marianne Krauss' 5Bs chose to deck EPE's halls with their song on recorders.

(Continued on Page 8)

SPERD teachers authorize strike vote

JANICE HUSER
Review Contributor

Just two days before the Christmas break, the Alberta Teachers' Association announced that teachers within St. Paul Education Regional Division had authorized a strike vote, a day earlier.

A meeting held on Dec. 18 saw SPERD teachers vote 90 per cent in favour of authorizing the ATA to request a government-supervised vote, according to an ATA media release sent out on Dec. 19.

SPERD teachers have been working for over 30 months without a finalized collective agreement, according to the ATA. The St. Paul division is one of 10 school boards in the province that have not reached a local settlement for the 2016/17 and 2017/18 school years.

"A key element of teachers' professionalism is a respectful relationship with our employer. We are asking for a small number of very reasonable improvements that would bring our agreement more in line with other teachers in the province and would be low or even no cost to the board," said Greater St. Paul Local president Connie Landsiedel, in the media release.

In response to the ATA media release, SPERD board chair Heather Starosielski said, "The board of trustees is disappointed and surprised that in the last month the ATA has twice voted down settlements that were supported by the Local ATA Negotiations Committee, the Provincial ATA representative and the government-appointed mediator. The board is currently evaluating and planning next steps."

At the Dec. 18 meeting, teachers considered the recommendations of a government-appointed mediator and voted to reject those terms for settlement because they offered no substantial improvements over an agreement previously rejected by teachers in November, reads the ATA media release.

Teachers are asking for what was described as minor improvements to family illness, bereavement and personal leave clauses, or some other no-cost improvements that would demonstrate respect from the school board.

"St. Paul teachers are looking for a fair and reasonable settlement; one that follows the pattern well-established by the 50 other boards already settled. Our teachers want to be treated like their colleagues in neighbouring jurisdictions," said Landsiedel.

"St. Paul Education is staffed by some 257 full-time equivalent teachers and approximately 314 support staff. Every employee whether it be a teacher or a support staff member is important to the success of our students. St. Paul Education's decisions are guided by what is best for students," said Starosielski, in response. "It is also recognized that teacher interests in bargaining may sometimes differ from board priorities for students."

(Continued on Page 7)

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SANTA'S ON HIS WAY after a stop at the first prize-winning home of Wanda and Murray Cochrane, where even the outdoor trees are decorated, two of them tied up in lighted bows.

Vicki Brooker photos

MAKING THE SEASON BRIGHT - Nemesio Tuliao and family always have an outstanding display, this year's taking second prize in the contest.

Watch next week's issue for the Best Dressed Business.

FIRST TIME CONTENDER Marlene Mitchell and family have put out a large and cheerful display that earned the judges' nod for third spot.

New winners for residential decorating

VICKI BROOKER
Review Staff

With directions to "go find some new winners," the judges of the annual Christmas Lighting and Decorating Contest found plenty to choose from as they toured Elk Point's streets earlier this week, although admitting that the winners from the past few years had once again done a spectacular job and would definitely be in the 'Honorable Mention' category.

First place went to Wanda and Murray Cochrane, whose roofs and railings were rimmed with lights, shrubbery twinkling and Santa and his sleigh achieving lift-off.. Bow-tied candy canes decking two tall trees bracketed the 52 Avenue scene.

Nemesio Tuliao has been a longtime contender and is back on the prize list in second place after several years' absence with a glittering and eye-catching array of trees and forest creatures.

Third place goes to a brand new resident. Marlene Mitchell, a few doors west of the Cochranes', whose home and yard are truly merry and bright.

Honorable mentions

Topping the list of honorable mentions are the winners of the past two years, Elvis Sibal and the Ginez family, whose displays are truly magnificent and show many weeks of planning and setting up. David Buksa's Ravine Drive home is also a glittering showpiece once again, and the displays at Ed and Patsy Zarowny's and Jack and Leona Bretzer's are definitely worthy of mention.

Other close contenders include a home with three-storey-tall pillars wrapped in lights, and Tuliao's next door neighbour, who looks like being a serious contender in the future.

Cash prizes will be awarded early in January to the winners, and the Elk Point Chamber of Commerce and the Town of Elk Point thank everyone for making our town shine this festive season.

Correction

In last week's report on Darcy Younghans' award, it was stated that he had been a former athletic director at F. G. Miller, however his role at the time he hired Jonathan Randall was as the school's principal. Susie Beckett was Randall's predecessor as athletic director. Our apologies.

Elk Point & District Ag. Society
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Sorry, non-profits – no MSI grants in 2019

Electronic water meter heads are town's top priority

VICKI BROOKER
Review Staff

Elk Point town council hated to break the bad news just before Christmas, but with the town's 2019 Municipal Sustainability Initiative (MSI) operating grant dropping by more that half, from $55,000 in 2018 to less than $27,000 for the coming year, the reluctant decision was made to use that amount for town operations rather than sharing it with non-profits, as has been done in recent years.

That decision came out of a special council meeting last Monday, before council recesses until the New Year.

The town has identified changing all the rest of the water meter heads to allow electronic reading as a top priority in 2019, and requires the incoming MSI grant to balance the budget.

Mayor Lorne Young called this "truly unfortunate," but pointed out that the MSI is to run out completely in two years for both operating and capital funding. "We absolutely understand that our volunteers are doing good work in the community, but this is a reflection of a fiscal reality."

The town is applying for a federal grant for the lift station upgrade, and is also applying for a federal grant for a new infrastructure assessment plan, which was last done in 2008. The infrastructure assessment allows the town to plan ahead for needed replacement of water and sewer lines and other infrastructure.

Evergreen proposal

The special meeting also included a rundown on a new proposal by Evergreen Landfill, which hopes to base the amount charged to municipalities on a combination of 50 per cent on population and 50 per cent on equalization assessment. Coun. Debra McQuinn, who represents the town on Evergreen's board, told council the landfill "needs a certain amount of dollars to operate. We currently pay on tonnage, and if that doesn't come in, the municipalities get a huge requisition at the end of the year. This way, they would be paid ahead of time and we wouldn't be looking at more huge bills for the surplus."

She noted that "being a partner makes sure that members are taking the tonnage through the gates, rather than looking for a cheaper place to haul to. It's an investment on our part, and it's in our best interest to see the tonnage goes through the gates." The change would see half of the amount paid up front and the balance at the end of each year, she said, estimating that it will cost the town of Elk Point about $807 more than previously.

"It will be Evergreen that makes the decision, the board will be voting on it on Jan. 10, " she noted.

"It's an interesting proposal," the mayor commented. "If it benefits Evergreen and keeps the cost down, that's good."

Land sale

The Dec. 17 meeting also included a lengthy closed session with a developer who is yet to be named. Coming out of the session, council agreed to offer Lot 6, Block 47, Plan 1233731, which would be consolidated with part of SW 7-57-6 W4, including a development agreement, and that the real estate contract reflect the changes.

County provides funding for groups

MEREDITH KERR
Review Contributor

A number of area groups received funding as a result of motions passed at the Dec. 11 county council meeting.

St. Paul 4-H Light Horse club

St. Paul 4-H Light Horse club received $1,500 to purchase obstacles and jumping equipment. According to the letter the club submitted to council, the parents and leaders the club borrowed the necessary equipment from previously have moved away from the area.

The club also plans to host a Regional 4-H Light Horse Camp in August 2019.

Kevin Wirsta declared a conflict of interest and excused himself from the meeting.

Mallaig Ag Society

Mallaig Ag Society will receive $87,500 from the 2018 budget. The figure includes $50,000 the county committed in March, as well as the $37,500 discussed at the November meeting following a presentation from the Mallaig Ag Society, covered in the Nov. 27 issue of the St. Paul Journal.

Chief Administrative Officer for the country Sheila Kitz noted the society is going ahead with the grant applications and with their project. "Administration thought council might want to provide Mallaig Ag Society with the amount budgeted in 2018, allowing us to budget a lesser amount in future years," said Kitz.

Recreational Facilities

Funding for recreational facilities in the County of St. Paul remained the same as in previous years. A portion of the money comes from province's Municipal Sustainability Initiative (MSI) Funding stream, which the county received $XXX from in 2018. A total of $110,630 was distributed between 27 groups, with most groups receiving $2400, and Ag Societies in St. Paul and the surrounding communities receiving between $3000 (St. Lina) and $14500 (Mallaig.)

Included in the agenda was also a more detailed breakdown of how many members and events the groups being funded host each year, the cost of their insurance and utilities, other funding sources, and the proportion of their annual costs covered by the grant.

"It shed some light on the history and where each individual organization is," said County Reeve Steve Upham.

Elk Point Recreation Grant Funding

Council approved a motion to allocate the remaining $73,000 budgeted for recreation in Elk Point.

The Elk Point Figure Skating Club will receive $2,000; Elk Point Allied Arts will get $8,000; Elk Point Curling Club will see $18,000; the A. G. Ross Arena will receive $30,000; and C. G. Baker Arena will get $15,000.

The Elk Point Pickleball Club received $2,000 from the county in June.

Enterprise Fleet Management

The County of St. Paul will save $134,300 in 2019 by leasing five light duty trucks from Enterprise Fleet Management instead of making a capital purchase.

Discussion of the program began during the Nov. 13 council meeting and was then referred to the Dec. 3 budget meeting. A resolution from council was required to go forward with the plan.

"I did have Kyle run this through RMA Insurance, and they also lease under this program and have had the contract vetted through their legal counsel, so they've done all the due diligence for the municipalities," said Sheila Kitz.

Coun. Darryl Younghans made the motion, which carried with a unanimous vote.

Break-in at Frog Lake General Store

STAFF WRITERS

RCMP confirmed that the Frog Lake General Store had been broken into on Dec. 16, causing extensive damage to the business.

A break and enter occurred on Dec. 16 at about 2 a.m., said Cpl. Chris Warren in an email with the St. Paul Journal.

"A grey Chevrolet extended cab with three unknown suspects made entry by backing into the store front doors," he explained. The suspects were in possession of a firearm.

The break-in resulted in "extensive damage to the exterior and interior of the building," and it was still unknown exactly what was taken, as of Monday morning.

If anyone has information about this incident, they are asked to contact Elk Point RCMP or Crimestoppers.

Suspects involved in the break-in are believed to be armed.

"Do not approach (them)," said Warren.

Editorial

That's a wrap!

By the time you read this, all the gifts will be under the tree, the turkey will be on its way to the oven and you will finally find time to sit back and reflect on all that the season has to offer.

The Inter-Faith Cantata and the Community Choir have already given us tremendous gifts of music, and Elk Point Baptist Church, Jack and Jill Playschool and Elk Point Elementary School have given proud parents, grandparents and siblings their gifts of great entertainment to enjoy.

Those who have taken time to drive around our streets in the past few weeks to search out the beautiful lighting and decorating at many homes have received the gift of beauty, and those who haven't seen the displays yet still have time to do so.

Have a wonderful week, everyone!

Celebrate Safely

Cannabis and alcohol use during the holidays

HEALTH CANADA

Holiday parties and get-togethers are a great way to spend time and enjoy the company of friends and family. Celebrate this holiday season and the New Year, but remember—it's important to know there are health risks if you choose to use cannabis or alcohol.

Here are some tips that can help reduce the potential harms associated with the use of these substances:

- Familiarize yourself with the health risks associated with cannabis and alcohol.
- Never mix cannabis with alcohol or other drugs.
- Do not drive if you have consumed cannabis, alcohol or drugs. Do not get into the car if you suspect the driver has consumed cannabis, alcohol or drugs.
- Never leave your drink unattended and do not accept drinks, even water, from someone you don't know.
- Do not mix alcohol with energy drinks. It can mask symptoms of intoxication.
- If you are travelling over the holidays, remember: it is illegal to take drugs that are not prescribed to you and cannabis across the border.
- If you choose to consume cannabis, start with a small amount of THC and wait until you feel the effects before you take more.
- Edible cannabis products present unique health and safety risks. It takes longer to feel the effects of cannabis edibles which could increase your risk of overconsumption.

Parties and holiday get-togethers can also provide occasions where illegal substances could be consumed. Any illegal drug can be tainted with other dangerous substances, such as fentanyl and carfentanil, which can lead to overdose and even death. If someone looks unwell and you suspect that they may have overdosed on drugs:

- Do not leave them alone. Stay with them and immediately call 9-1-1 or your local emergency help line. Follow their instructions.
- Stay until help arrives. The Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act protects individuals from simple drug possession charges and some violations of conditions related to simple possession when seeking emergency help during an overdose situation.
- If you or someone you know uses drugs, carry naloxone, which can temporarily reverse an opioid overdose.
- Never use drugs alone and stay with your friends and people you trust.

Way Back When...

Full council, Business of the Year, treatment plant upgrade

Here's the news that made the headlines of the Lakeland Review and Elk Point Review for the week of Dec. 24 in...

1988

Elk Point had a full slate of town council for the first time in two years, with Ed Buck taking the vacant council chair after a by-election victory over Lawrence Pidluzny and Adele Mandryk. Santa made time for appearances at the Elk Point Library storytime and Clandonald Agricultural Society Christmas Film Show in the busy days just before Christmas.

1993

Shamrock Valley Enterprises won the Chamber of Commerce Business of the Year award, presented by Jacques Bellerive of Canada Post. Elk Point Community Choir charmed two sell-out crowds with their Christmas concerts with an original song by Rob Holliday and Gabe Bayduza, "Child of the Manger", sung by Holliday, Donna Babcock, Suzan Bartholomew and Rita Sanregret, accompanied by Bayduza and Marge Heffernan, one of the highlights.

1998

Water treatment plant upgrading, estimated at $80,000, was at the top of town council's list for infrastructure priorities as they perused the recent infrastructure study at the final meeting of the year. Fears that Elk Point Health Centre would be closed escalated after George Cuff and Associates was hired by the provincial government to help the region develop a deficit elimination budget.

2003

The reason for the season came through loud and clear in the first of tow Elk Point Elementary Christmas concerts, where "Once upon a time on a starry night..." a very special baby was born in a stable," with shepherds and wise men following a wondrous star. In the second concert, cousins by the dozens rattled up the road on a rusty John Deere to celebrate the occasion in "'Twas One Crazy Night."

2008

Dance Education Elk Point students gave their first-ever winter performance, complete with sugarplum fairies, as a pre-Christmas treat for proud families and friends. Santa and his techno-elf checked out Christmas in other countries in Elk Point Elementary's first concert of the season, while the second brought back the surf-and-sand hit that thrilled the 2001 audience

2013

CAPACITY CROWDS enjoyed a pair of very entertaining Christmas concerts at Elk Point Elementary School the first, involving the 'A' classes, telling the story of the fourth Wise Man, second from left above, who was told by the other three that he must have a gift to take to the baby Jesus. Thursday's second concert was a total change of scene, as the North Pole gang hosted a television special starring Santa Claus.

The Elk Point Review publishes a variety of opinions as a contribution to debate on matters of public concern. Unsigned editorials express the view of this newspaper's editorial board which includes the Publisher and the Editor. Signed pieces express the view of the individual writer.

Elk Point Review

5022 - 49 Avenue, Elk Point, AB

Mailing Address:
Box 309, Elk Point, Alberta T0A 1A0
or Box 159, St. Paul, Alberta T0A 3A0

Publisher: Clare Gauvreau **Editor:** Vicki Brooker
Email Address: vbrooker@stpaul.greatwest.ca

Vicki Brooker
EDITOR

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2019
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Playschool celebrates the season in song

VICKI BROOKER
Review Staff

Seven students of Elk Point's Jack and Jill Playschool celebrated the Christmas season with last Tuesday's concert , which also showed off some of the new skills learned since playschool started this September.

Proud parents, grandparents and siblings were welcomed by playschool teacher Tammy Klatt , who told them, "without you, playschool wouldn't be here," before reading "A Recipe for Christmas All Year Long" and "A Christmas New Year's Wish" and offering an inspiring quote.

Happy Birthday wishes were sung to two of the students who will celebrate during the Christmas break, and also to one very surprised reporter.

Then it was the children's turn to entertain, starting off with their "Good Morning" song and recitations of their A, B, Cs and 1, 2, 3s before they launched into a medley of their favourite Christmas songs: "Jingle Bells", "Santa's On His Way," "Guess Who", "Christmas Time Is Here," "Little Reindeer," "We Wish You a Merry Christmas", winding up with a jingle bell accompanied version of "Jingle Bells.

Students were presented with Christmas tree ornaments and snowmen crafted by Klatt, and bags of their recent Christmas crafts, before they welcomed a jolly visitor in a red suit, who posed for photos with each one before everyone enjoyed a holiday lunch.

HAPPY HOLIDAY FACES - Jack and Jill Playschool instructor Tammy Klatt and her students (left to right) Connor, Aspyn. Alexander, Neil, Leah, Jacob and William were almost vibrating with excitement as they took the stage at Elk Point Christian Community Church for last Tuesday's Playschool Christmas Concert, with an appreciative audience of parents, grandparents and siblings on hand to hear their recitations and songs of the season.

A GIFT FOR JACOB - Tammy Klatt handed out handmade gifts to each of her students.

JINGLING ALL THE WAY! Everyone was in fine voice and with jingle bells in hands for their final number of the program, hoping it would bring Santa through the door.

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SPERD teachers

(Continued from Font Page)

Now that teachers have rejected the terms of settlement, a legislated two-week cooling off period has started. Neither party can take a strike or lockout vote during that time. The authorization for a strike vote allows ATA negotiators to apply for a strike vote after the two-week period, according to the ATA.

"If a strike mandate is approved, teachers could legally strike after providing 48 hours notice to the employer," reads the ATA media release.

The Alberta Teachers' Association acts as the bargaining agent for all teachers employed in public, separate and francophone school divisions in the province. SPERD employs teachers in public and Catholic schools in St. Paul, Ashmont, Mallaig, Elk Point, Hairy Hill, Heinsburg, Myrnam and Two Hills.

According to the ATA, there are about 270 full-time and part-time teachers in the division.

Announcements

IN MEMORIAM

IN LOVING MEMORY OF PETE STAFFORD
Aug. 23, 1948-Dec 25, 2006

In loving memory of a dear husband, father, grandfather and great-grandfather.
Your heart of gold stopped beating
Two smiling eyes at rest,
God broke our hearts to prove
He only takes the Best.
The tears in our eyes will
wipe away,
But the love in our hearts
Will forever stay.
Loved and missed so very much by Karen and Family.

OBITUARY

BARRY LAWRENCE FEDIUK

On Wednesday, December 12, 2018 Barry Lawrence Fediuk of Elk Point, Alberta passed away peacefully at the age of 64 years.

Barry is lovingly survived by his partner of over ten years, Dianne Lasko of Elk Point; sister: Brenda; two brothers: Lyle & Brian.

As per Barry's wishes, cremation has taken place and no formal funeral service will be held.

Memorial tributes in memory of Barry may be sent to Bonnyville Health Centre, c/o Cancer Unit, PO Bag 1008, Bonnyville, AB T9N 2J7.

Please visit our website at www.mementofuneralchapel.com to view online obituary and send condolences. Memento funeral chapel, st. Paul, bonnyville and cold lake 1-780-615-3113. The Thackeray Family ~ A Tradition of Trust since 1975

Thackeray Memento FUNERAL CHAPEL
MEMENTO FUNERAL CHAPEL,
Bonnyville, Cold Lake, St. Paul
780-826-3113
The Thackeray Family ~ A Tradition of Trust since 1975

LIONS SUPPORT BENEFIT DANCE - Jason Boorse of Elk Point and Disof trict Lions Club presented a $1,000 cheque to Marilyn Shapka, Roberta (Bobbi) Jones the St. Paul & Community Family Benefit Society in support for their 11th Annual New Year's Eve Benefit Dance.

Photo submitted

RCMP hopeful new tools will reduce impaired driving

MEREDITH KERR
Review Contributor

Recent changes to federal impaired driving legislation have St. Paul RCMP Staff Sgt. Corey Blize hopeful there will be a reduction in the number of impaired driving offenses this holiday season.

Enshrined in Bill C-46 as part of the federal response to legalizing cannabis, the updates to the Criminal Code mean police are now able to demand a breath sample from any driver they pull over, not just those pulled over on suspicion of impaired driving.

"This gives us the ability to screen persons where sometimes the impairment is not as evident," said Blize.

According to Blize, St. Paul RCMP has members trained in the standard field sobriety testing and some members have taken training to become drug recognition experts.

"Hopefully people will co-operate. Often when new legislation comes in people are a little more tame for a while until they get used to it. People pay more attention because there's the increased awareness, but then with time those bad habits often start to come back out," said Blize.

He said the biggest thing RCMP want to see is when people are having their Christmas, New Year's and other holiday gatherings, to make sure everyone has the ability to get home safely, whether that means calling a taxi for them, or arranging for a designated driver service ahead of time.

"Our biggest hope is that no one has to lose a loved one over the holidays," said Blize.

While it's still being investigated, Blize points to a recent collision in the area that occurred.

"It's still being investigated, but we had a three vehicle collision the other day which may have involved alcohol. No fatalities, but there were some injuries," said Blize.

The new law also makes it illegal to be at or over the blood alcohol content limit within two hours of being in control of a vehicle. This means people will no longer be able to claim they had drank the alcohol immediately before driving and that it had not been absorbed in to their system yet.

And finally, the changes also increase the minimum penalties for impaired driving. Previously, a first offence carried a $1,000 fine, a second offence 30 days jail, and a third offence 120 days jail.

Now, a first offence still has a minimum $1,000 fine, but only if the blood alcohol is between 80 and 119 mg. If the blood alcohol is 120-159mg, the fine is increased to $1,500, and if the blood alcohol is over 160mg the minimum fine rises to $2,500. Refusing to give a sample has a $2,000 fine.

The penalties for second and third offenses remain the same.

DEBBIE WOODS' KINDERGARTNERS started off Wednesday's concert with their dance from "The Nutcracker."

DO YOU HEAR WHAT I HEAR? - Rhonda Stuparyk and Rayel Cardinal's 2/3 class performs on xylophones.

MUPPET MAYHEM - The 4As shovel snow, build an ice castle and a snowman and go shopping.

EPE concert

(Continued from Front Page)

The oldest movie featured was Bob Hope's "The Lemon Drop Kid" from 1952, with Debra Younghans' Grade 6B accompanying their rendition of "Silver Bells" on their ukuleles.

One of the movies best loved by generation after generation is the 1965 "A Charlie Brown Christmas," and Carmen Waselick's 2A students commemorated with a bell choir number, "Christmas Time is Here".

Another favourite cartoon feature is 'The Muppet Christmas Carol," with Courtney Martin's 4As shoveling 'snow,' building a snow fort and building a snowman as they sang "One More Sleep Til Christmas."

Alison Newby's 1A class stole the show with the title song from "The Little Drummer Boy," playing drums and cymbals in accompaniment to music director Mary Anne Martinson's piano.

Two group numbers completed the show, all the A classes joining in to sing "Santa's on His Way," followed by all the B classes and the Kindergarten advising the crowd to "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas."

THE FIRST NOWELL - Reanne Mudryk's 5A class played the traditional carol on recorders.

SILVER BELLS - Debra Younghans' Grade 6B sing the old favourite and accompany the song on their ukuleles.

Deficit is manageable but not sustainable

MEREDITH KERR
Review Contributor

There's good news and bad news when it comes to enrolment numbers within St. Paul Education Regional Division (SPERD).

The good news is that SPERD is now below both the provincial targets and averages for class sizes in every area, except K-3 where they are over by just 0.2 students. The bad news is the division's budget is directly linked to the number of students enrolled in classes and the $1 million deficit projected for 2018-19 has now been revised to $1.2 million.

"Given our reserves, that's still manageable, but what is manageable is not sustainable over the long term," said Jean Champagne, the secretary-treasurer for SPERD in his report to the board at the Dec. 12 board meeting.

According to Champagne, there is an $800,000 deficit for 2017-18.

"That was in line with budget projections, so it wasn't unexpected and mostly due to declining enrolment. The board was committed to maintaining staffing levels as long as we can, to see what happens with the enrolment trend," said Champagne.

To offset the deficits, the school board has tapped in to reserve funds.

"Our fully combined reserves right now, we're at $3.9 million, $2.3 million of that is for operating reserves and that puts us at about five per cent operating and getting close to as low as we can go there," said Champagne.

According to information on the Alberta Education website, there are five jurisdictions with smaller class sizes than SPERD. Of those two are charter school societies; two are francophone divisions, including the East Central Francophone Education Region No. 3, whose central office is in St. Paul; and one is the sparsely populated Prairie Land Regional Division in east central Alberta, which serves just 1,400 students in 15,500 square kilometres.

"We can almost say that we have the smallest class sizes in the province," said superintendent Glen Brodziak in his report to the board on Dec. 12.

ACOL guidelines recommend 17 students in K to 3 classes, 23 students in Grades 4 to 6, 25 students in Grades 7 to 9 and 27 in Grades 10 through 12. The provincial average is 20.2 students in K to 3 classes, 22.8 in Grades 4 to 6, 23.5 in Grades 7 to 9, and 23.2 in Grades 10 through 12, but data released on the Alberta Education website reveals many high school classes in Edmonton and Calgary have between 35 and 43 students.

"We would have to cut between 15 and 35 teachers in our division to get to the same PTR as schools around us and to provincial averages," said Brodziak.

Within SPERD, there is an average of 17.2 students per K to 3 class, 19.7 for Grades 4 to 6, 17.9 for Grades 7 to 9, and 14.2 for the high school classes. None of the class sizes reported in the 2017-18 data exceeded 30 students.

"We cut seven teachers last year because our enrolment was way down, but priorities weren't changing. And of course we cut substantially in our office and we cut in other areas because you continue to say the priority is class sizes," said Brodziak, noting SPERD has the smallest central office staff per pupil in the province. He emphasized the positive results he believes the small class sizes achieve.

"I know you're reminding us just before we start doing budget talks," said board chair Heather Starosielski.

St. Paul Education has lost 356 students since the 2014-15 school year.